



## Magic moments in 'Oz'

IT WOULD be rather a clever thing to say that *The Wizard of Oz* was not the most magic of productions that we have seen from the Faringdon Community Theatre — but that it had its spells...

But that would be to belittle the opportunities so willingly offered by this group to their enthusiastic younger members. It would have been so easy for them to play safe, and choose a youthful-looking adult to take the demanding role of Dorothy: the braver option in the case of this production was well rewarded by a seamless performance from Christina Willett.

Christina maintained her transatlantic accent admirably, and hardly faltered in her demanding role. Her stagecraft was mature, though she still has something to learn about acting from the heart as well as from her lines.

This is the pantomime season, and one expects one's drama to be somewhat over-the-top, even if it is not actually Jack and the Beanstalk or Aladdin but rather a colourful modern children's fairy story. Yet in this production, the only one to go over the top was Kate Peer, making her debut with the company as the shrieking, hissable Wicked Witch of the West, and two of her witch friends, played by Helen Barter and Jo Webster, in a delightful cameo that came closest to providing pantomime slapstick.

The rest of the cast somehow got trapped in the script; over-

whelmed by the need to follow the yellow brick road, come what may. Maybe they were inhibited by the reportedly outrageous demands from the estate of the writer, L. Frank Baum, for £500 in royalties!

Dave Headey as the not-so-brainless Scarecrow and Joan Lee as the cuddly Lion both made much of the rich possibilities offered by these well-loved characters, but left me feeling that there was still more comedy to be wrung out of them, and a deep well of pathos to be tapped. They did not draw nearly enough "ah's" from the audience!

For my money, the show came most alive when two young ladies, Claire Green and Sarah Nutbrown, began their double act as Gloria and her friend. It was well into the second half when these two suddenly brought a sparkle

into the production— lots of smiles to go with the sweet singing, and a kind of energy and enthusiasm that up to then had seemed somewhat lacking.

As we have come to expect, the sets and the costumes were stunning — well above standard for amateur dramatics. The whole show was a good team effort between directors Carolyn Taylor and Lucy Walden and Producer Jo Webster, the backstage people, and the cast, which also included Debbie Lock, Naomi Whale, Lubna Yaqub, Jenny Crosby, Sarah McDougall, Kate Lord, Roger Leitch, Walther and Irene Schoenberg, Ieuan Thomas, Rory Willett and Julian Probert — plus those who added to the spectacle as Jitterbugs, farmhands, Munchkins, Ozians and skeleton dancers.

—I.S.

